

## **Count Your Blessings**

### **Colossians 1:12-14**

#### **Pastor John Miller**

In Colossians 1:12-14, the apostle Paul is praying for the believers in Colosse. His prayer began in verse 9. But starting in verse 12, he said that he was “giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

I believe the hallmark characteristic of the Spirit-filled, Christian life is thankfulness. If you're a believer and you have the Holy Spirit filling your heart, it will be evident by thankfulness.

So ask yourself, “Am I a thankful Christian?” Verse 12 says, “giving thanks to the Father.”

Note that Paul is writing these words as he prays while he's in prison. If I was in prison, I don't know that I would be thankful. I would probably be moping and complaining and griping and wondering, “Where are You, God?!” But joy and thankfulness are the fruit of the Spirit. So they're not dependent upon our circumstances. They're not dependent upon what's happening around us. They're like an artesian well in our soul. When we're focused on God and fellowship with God, we have the joy of the Lord and have thankful hearts. So even though Paul was in prison, he prayed.

A little footnote to this is verse 9: “Since the day we heard it, [we] do not cease to pray for you.” Paul was a man of prayer. He was an apostle, he had great experience with Christ, he had all this knowledge, but he knew the power of prayer. If Paul was a man of prayer, how much more should we be men and women of prayer and use the power of prayer. So Paul was imprisoned, but he was thankful for the believers, and we have here the text that he prayed for the believers in Colosse.

Let's set the context for Paul's prayer, in verses 9-11. He was praying for three things. First, he prayed that they would be “filled with the knowledge of His will.” He said, “For this reason...” the reason was he was hearing about their faithful love, verses 4-5 “...we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and...” here's the petition “...to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

When Paul was in prison, he not only wrote Colossians, but he also wrote Philippians, Ephesians and Philemon. They're called “the prison epistles” of Paul. And when he wrote them, he was writing them to Colosse, because they had been invaded by false teachers. Those false teachers were known as “gnostics,” who claimed to have a superior knowledge. And Gnosticism isn't dead; it's still alive today. They believed that your salvation depended upon superior knowledge that could only be gotten from them. They were the dispensers of this gnostic knowledge.

So Paul was praying for the Colossians; that they would know by the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God the true knowledge, and that they would be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

Second, Paul prayed that they would “walk worthy of the Lord,” verse 10. So we have the knowledge and then we have the walk. The walk is the living out of the Christian life. We are to “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” And because of the gnostic heresy, Paul keeps coming back to this “knowledge.” You find it in the Word of God by knowing the Son of God.

Third, in verse 11, Paul prays that they would be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power...” The Greek word is “dunamis,” from which we get our word “dynamite.” “...for all patience and longsuffering with joy.” He’s not talking about miracles, signs and wonders, healing the sick or raising the dead. He says that we might be patient.

When we think of the power of God, we don’t often think about patience, which is steadfast endurance or “longsuffering” or joyfulness. These are the evidences of a Spirit-filled life.

So Paul prayed for three things: “filled with the knowledge of His will,” “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him” and that they would be “strengthened with might [by] His glorious power.” Then, in verse 12 of our text, that they would be “giving thanks to the Father.” They were to have thankful hearts. The Spirit-filled life is a thankful life.

It’s interesting that in Colossians, Paul had so much to say about being thankful. In Colossians 2:7, Paul says that you should be “abounding...with thanksgiving.” This should overflow in your life. Colossian 3:17 says, “giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” And Colossians 4:2 says, “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.” This is just a little sampling; every chapter in Colossians has a reference to giving thanks unto God.

Now in our text, Paul moves from praying or petitioning God for blessings to praising and thanking God for blessings already received. If you want to be a thankful Christian, count your blessings.

“Count your blessing;

Name them one by one.

Count your many blessings;

See what God has done.”

Are you counting your blessings? Are you thankful for what God has given to you? Here Paul is not petitioning; he’s praising God.

Notice these phrases: “who has qualified us,” verse 12; “He has delivered us from the power of

darkness” and “has...conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son,” verse 13; and “in whom we have redemption,” verse 14.

One of the reasons I wanted to preach on this text is because there is something so vitally important that you, as a believer, should know what you have in Christ, who you are in Christ. You can't live the Christian life without knowing what you possess in Christ. So Paul uses the word “has,” in verses 12 and 13 and “have” in verse 14. All those are in the past tense. They also speak of present possession. These are things that we have, and that is true of every believer.

This is one of the things that doctrinally really excites me: to discover in the Bible what I have automatically, simply because I was born again and I'm a child of God. It's not because I've walked with God for years; it's because I've been born again, taken out of darkness and transferred into God's kingdom. It happens immediately. And no matter how long I've walked with God or how spiritual I might seem, these blessings are true of all believers.

If you feel like a second-class citizen of heaven, I want you to know that there are no second-class citizens in heaven. If you've been born again, you have these blessings. You don't have to pray for them, you don't have to petition for them, you don't have to beg for them, you don't have to plead for them, you don't have to be good enough for them. You already have them; they are yours in Jesus Christ. These are the blessings given to all Christians. They are from God the Father, through God the Son, by the agency of God the Holy Spirit.

From our text, I want to give you four blessings every Christian should be thankful for. I want you to meditate on these four blessings, and then stop and give thanks to the Lord every day this week for them.

Blessing number one is that He “has qualified us,” verse 12. Paul says, “giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.” A good way to render that is that I am qualified for heaven, or I am fit to go to heaven, and we'll be lit by God's glory.

Now notice in verse 12 that we are thanking God the Father. This text is Trinitarian; blessings come from God the Father, through God the Son, by the power of God the Holy Spirit. And who are we thankful to? To God the Father. Why? Because “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” James 1:17 says, “There is no variation or shadow of turning.” God brings all these blessings to us. And these are blessings that only God can give. You can't earn or merit or deserve them. Only God can give them, and they're eternal, spiritual blessings. They are coming to us by the Holy Spirit, through the Son and to the glory of God the Father.

What does it mean that He has made us fit or “meet,” in the King James translation? The best way to render that is to say He “has qualified us.” There are a lot of things I'm not qualified to do. But I am qualified, as a believer in Jesus, as a Christian, to go to heaven.

This is what's called our “position in Christ.” It's not our practice. You need to understand the

difference between position and practice. Position has to do with your justification. You are positionally righteous in Christ; you're declared righteous. Your practice has to do with your sanctification; you're growing to be more like Christ. The third phase is glorification which happens when you go to heaven, and you're made perfectly righteous. You get a new body and there's no more sin. You're in His presence.

Verse 12 is talking about your position in Christ. Christians need to understand positional truth. The moment you were born again, you are a believer in Christ. You are a Christian because you've been born again. The moment you are born again, you are positionally in Christ. And I am convinced by Scripture, that once you are in Christ, you'll always be in Christ. You can never be taken out of Christ. But not everyone agrees with that.

You can't put yourself in Christ; the Holy Spirit does that. You say, "Well, I repented and believed." Yes, but the Holy Spirit does that; He's the One who places you in Christ. And you can't take yourself out of Christ. No man can take you out of God's hand (Isaiah 49:16). That would include you. So this doctrine brings great assurance to the believer.

When you don't measure up in your walk, you feel condemned, and Satan is beating you over the head with condemnation and saying, "You're not saved. You're really not a Christian." Read Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." And the chapter ends with no separation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," verse 39.

So you need to understand that the moment you were born again, you were taken out of Adam and placed in Christ. And once in Christ, always in Christ.

When Jesus was dying on the Cross, the thief said to Him, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:42-43). Jesus didn't say he wasn't qualified, that he wasn't fit. He didn't say, "You're a thief! You're dying on a cross! You're paying for your own sin!" No; Jesus said that the thief was qualified and would go to heaven that day.

So you need to understand that if you're a Christian, you are in Christ. His righteousness has been imputed to you, so you stand in Him perfectly righteous positionally. The goal of the Christian's life then is to live out your life pleasing to the Lord. It's not a license to sin but a motivation to holiness; that you want to please the Lord and be thankful for what He has done for you.

It's God the Father who qualifies us; we can't qualify ourselves. It's done by the work of the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit.

What does He qualify us for? For heaven. Verse 12 says, "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." This is a fancy way of Paul saying that if you've been born again, you are in Christ and you are on your way to heaven. In John 14:1-3, Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God [the Father], believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many

mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Jesus is going to come to take us home to heaven; whether by the rapture or by death. Either way it doesn't matter; we're going to heaven.

What you're thankful for is that you've been qualified to go to heaven. And Jesus is preparing a place there. You'll be in heaven some day with the Lord. So we should wake up every morning and say, "Lord, thank you for qualifying me. Thank you for making me fit for heaven."

And it's not by my goodness, by rites or rituals, by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." It says, "You have been saved," so it's a certainty. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." We're not saved by our good works; we're saved unto good works. They are the fruit of our salvation.

Heaven is our eternal destiny. R. Kent Hughes said, "One day we will pass beyond the stars. And when they have burned themselves out, we will shine even brighter."

So the number one blessing is that you're on your way to heaven.

Number two is that "He has delivered us," verse 13. So He has saved us to go to heaven, and "He has delivered us from the power of darkness." The verb "delivered" is used in the Bible only of God. Specifically, in the New Testament, the Greek verb for "delivered" is only used of God. It speaks of Him "rescuing us." From the moment you were saved, you and every believer were rescued. We were made fit for heaven and rescued from the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of Satan and delivered into God's kingdom.

Only God can deliver us and rescue us. Man's great problem is sin. It's a problem that no scientist, philosopher, educator, politician or legislator can fix. Only God can deliver us from sin. In Ephesians 2, it says that before we were saved, we "were dead in trespasses and sin" and were disobedient and separated from God. "We all...conducted ourselves in the lust of our flesh." We were depraved and had a sinful nature and were doomed under the wrath of God. Then God, in His great love, came to rescue us.

I like the concept of the rescuing of God. He sent Jesus to rescue us. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should..." or "shall" "...not perish but have..." that's in the present possessive tense "...everlasting life." You have eternal life as an everlasting possession. And you are in Christ, so there is no condemnation. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

So we are saved from sin's penalty and power, and one day when we get to heaven, we'll be saved from sin's presence altogether. As a result, we should get up in the morning and pray, "Lord, thank You for making me fit for heaven. Thank You, Lord, for delivering me from the

power of Satan's kingdom of darkness."

Blessing number three is that He has transferred or translated us. Verse 13 says, "He has... conveyed..." or "transferred" "...us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Not only has He delivered us from Satan's kingdom of darkness; He has transferred us into the kingdom of His Son.

When Jesus was baptized and the Father spoke from heaven about the Son, He said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Father loves the Son; how marvelous that is.

The word "transferred" was used to describe the deportation of a population from one country to another. We are hearing a lot about deportation right now in America. But before you were saved, you were living in Satan's kingdom, and then when you were born again, you were deported, translated, transferred or conveyed into God's kingdom. That's good news! You were taken out of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light or "into the kingdom of the Son of His love." The kingdom of God is the kingdom of love. I like that. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. The Father loves God's people and God's people love the Father and the Son. And God's people love one another.

When the Israelites left Egypt and they went into the Promised Land, that is an Old Testament picture or type of us being taken out of the bondage of sin and being transferred into the kingdom of love.

This happens the moment you are born again. You don't have to pray for it. You don't have to tarry for it. You don't have to ask for it. You don't have to seek it. It comes carte blanche as a result of being a child of God. We live in God's kingdom and heaven is our future home. So we should be thankful for it.

Blessing number four is that He has redeemed us. Verse 14 says, "in whom..." referring to "the Son of His love" or to "Jesus Christ," in verse 13 "...we have redemption..." a key word "...through His blood..." referring to His death on the Cross "...the forgiveness of sins."

So number one, we've been qualified for heaven; number two, we've been delivered from Satan's kingdom; number three, we've been transferred into the kingdom of His Son; and number four, as slaves we've been redeemed. He has bought us and set us free. That is one of the most important doctrines in the Scriptures: our redemption.

Someone said, "Cut the Bible anywhere, and it bleeds red with redemptive truth." From Genesis and the Fall to the final state of eternity, it's all about redemption. The Cross stands prominent in the middle, and the blood line of Christ runs through the whole revelation of God to man.

Let me give you five facts about our redemption from verse 14. Number one, it is in Christ. "In whom" refers to Christ. There is no redemption apart from Jesus Christ. He is the only

Redeemer. Jesus said that "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6). That's pretty clear. I don't know why people have a problem with that. There is only one way to heaven, and it is through, in and by the Person of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

Number two is its certainty. Verse 14 says, "We have." Redemption is what we have; it is certain. Again, John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Number three is its meaning. What does the word "redemption" mean? It literally means "to purchase and set free by paying a price." We were slaves to sin, but He purchased us by paying the price and set us free.

Number four is its means: "through His blood." That is a reference to the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Cross is the center of all God's revelation to man. It is talking about His substitutionary, sacrificial, voluntary death on the Cross for our sins. Jesus is our Redeemer. He died on the Cross, shed His precious blood to redeem us, to buy us back to God. Every Christian has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. I like that truth of redemption.

When you get to heaven, the number one theme you'll hear that the saints are singing about is redemption. It's "through His blood," and that applies to every kindred, nation, tribe and tongue (Revelation 7:9). We're all going to be singing that. But angels can't sing that; they're not redeemed. Humankind alone can be redeemed. And we're not redeemed by "corruptible things like silver and gold." We're not redeemed by "aimless conduct received by tradition from [our] fathers." But we are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

This is a picture of the Old Testament Passover. At the Passover, a lamb was slain, its blood was applied to the doorposts and lintels of the house, so that the death angel would pass over the house. But that was only a shadow of the blood of Christ, which would come to cleanse and forgive our sins.

So the result is forgiveness, which is number five. Verse 14 says, "the forgiveness of sins." In verse 14, Paul says we've been redeemed in Christ through His death, through His blood, and it brings automatically "the forgiveness of sins."

If we had just one thing to be thankful for, it would be the forgiveness of our sins. That's enough to be rejoicing over.

If we had a testimonial service, and some of us stood up and said what we used to be before conversion, others would run out of the church. "Get me outta here!" Aren't you glad that all your sins have been forgiven?

The etymology of the word "forgiven" is "carried away" or "to take away." The picture of that is the scapegoat. They would place their hands on a goat and symbolically that would place their

sins on the goat. Then they would release that goat. So you wanted to get a fast goat that likes to run as far as possible. The goat would take off and disappear over the distant hills. So it was a picture of “There go my sins!” But that was good for only a year. Or even worse, maybe the next morning when you woke up, the goat was back on the front porch! “Get away, goat! At least give me a little break!”

Now I want to give you six verses. Read and meditate on them. Marinate your heart and mind in them. They picture our forgiveness. The first one is Psalm 103:12, which says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Isn’t that a great picture? God takes my sins “as far as the east is from the west” away from me.

Verse number two is Micah 7:19. It says, “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Don’t you love that? He takes our sins and drops them “into the depths of the sea.” Someone said, “But then He puts up a sign that says, ‘Satan, no fishing.’” I like that.

Verse number three is Isaiah 38:17: “You have cast all my sins behind Your back.” Isn’t that a great picture? It means that God doesn’t remember them.

Number four is Isaiah 44:22, which says, “I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud your sins.” So He takes a blotter or an eraser and wipes out all our sins.

Number five is Hebrews 8:12. “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” This is a description of the new covenant. How marvelous!

And number six is Psalm 51:2. David wrote this psalm after he committed his horrible sin of adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah, in trying to cover his sin. David prayed, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” So we need to be washed and cleansed from our sins.

O the joy of having sins forgiven! That’s something to be thankful for. That’s something to celebrate. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, your sins have been forgiven.

So we have four blessings as Christians: made fit or qualified for heaven—heaven’s our home; delivered out of Satan’s kingdom of darkness, transferred into the kingdom of God’s dear Son; and redeemed by the blood of Christ, forgiven of all our sins.